

IAN SAMPSON

THE TALE OF PINUCCIO AND NICCOLOSA
after *Decameron* IX.6

So ends the tale of Calindrino,
who made the crowd buzz
like a giddy neutrino,

and again they'd buzz
when one of the women, a *mafiosa*,
bid Panfilo tell a tale, which was:

"Get this. Niccolosa,
not the love of Calindrino,
there's another Niccolosa

who lived by a casino,
her dad's, in the valley
of Mugnone, serving *vino*

locale to pilgrims who rally
on the highway to Rome.
A hot tamale,

Niccolosa, still at home
at sixteen, with a brother
(age two) and a mother to comb

her curls, or smother
(with velvet) her curves. Enter a libertine
from Florence (a smoother

operator she'd never seen)
who caught her gaze, cocksure,
at she nibbled a tangerine

and made him heartsore
under his white shirt
(Armani, our man wore).

She lead him on, the flirt,
dropped her wimple for Prada
and a skirt

that flashed like an armada
afire. First date (his grotto):
dancing lambada

to the tap of her stiletto,
he let her swoop: 'I love you,'
he said and she said, 'Ditto.'

She'd undo him impromptu
but the man,
Pinuccio, to cushion her virtue,

ad-libbed a plan:
he called a cab for the damsel
then he got his sedan

tanked up with diesel
and buffed the autobody
like Bellini at an easel;

and he revved the Maserati
with an air of irreverence
and cruised the autostrada

out of Florence.
Adriano, his crony, rode shotgun.
They let the cadence

of the engine run
shrill, pulled up to the motel
by the last threads of sun

and rang the doorbell.
Her father, a kind of underboss,
offered Zinfandel

and Calvados
(both contraband) to get them buzzed
and mumbled like a contrabass.

Old news: the casino's bust;
the boss'll rent his cozy home
to cozen florins from his guest.

Double bed with memory foam
and meals are free: veal ravioli
by the gastronome

at seven, with lemon aioli
and a tumbler of rum
to purge the *E. coli*.

Picture their home: one room,
two beds by one wall, one by the other,
and slim as a catacomb;

Nicolossa alone, her mother
and father by the baby's crib,
the lodgers together.

As they slept, he slid glib
out of bed, Pinuccio,
and glid to his girl to put his lip

to hers, livid with libido,
and made love (his forte)
incognito.

Let the *commedia dell'arte*
begin: a cat toggled (with a forepaw)
the pianoforte;

the mother got up to draw
the curtain: what's amiss?
Adriano, by Murphy's Law,

was out to piss
and groping back to bed, the crib in his way,
shifted it from their side to his.

She, still in negligée,
rejoined her man, or the man
she took for hers amid the disarray

of an altered floor-plan
and slipped under his arm
(Adriano's) his courtesan.

Pinuccio, his charm
 spent, afraid to be caught with a coed
 by the gendarme

or his wife, went to bed
 and got cozy
 in a quilt he thought his, misled

by the crib. 'Niccolosa,'
 he said, 'I frigged her like a knave
 in a tome of *curiosa*.'

And held his breath a semibreve
 when a hand fiddled at his throat.
 'Fear me, Casanova; I'm the reeve

that fed you, and you gloat
 you glut your urges on my girl.
 Why not dote

on her with daffodils, or snip a curl
 from her wimple?
 To rob her of her pearl,

Pinuccio, is death.' Atremble,
 the lover bluffed: 'What now?'
 (As a barrel fondled his temple.)

'What *now*?'
 said the boss like trumpeted brass.
 'I'll tell you what now.

I get medieval on your ass
 with a waterboard and holy water
 blessed at High Mass.'

To thwart slaughter,
 the mother, like a mute belladonna,
 moved to her daughter.

‘Bemoan no Desdemona,
 husband: you’re drunk
 and croon Corona

by the bubble. Our girl’s in the bunk
 I’ve huddled in all night.
 So tell me who’s the hunk

lying upright
 by your elbow with a brow more blotto
 than Snow White?’

‘My bro,’ said Adriano,
 ‘he dreams he’s Cupid
 in a nude by Watteau

and wanders rigid
 in his sleep. Rub an ember
 on his palm; he’ll lift an eyelid.’

Limp as if from slumber
 (or from rum), Pinuccio woke
 and feigned to not remember

his dream. They broke
 bread over custard blended
 from egg yolk

and the offended
 sipped a cup of espresso:
 all’s mended.

So recto turned to verso:
they paid up in florins
and fuelled up with Esso

without interference
and drove the Maserati
into Florence,

tasting victory (or was it Bacardi?).
As they blinked out of view,
Niccolosa recalled her lover's body

on hers, a preview of a rendezvous
to come. Or like Carmela Soprano,
when the cat (*déjà vu*)

pawed a tune on the piano,
her mother dreamt of Adriano."